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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes the views and attitudes toward higher education of 43 leaders from Detroit (Michigan), Memphis (Tennessee), Cherry Hill (New Jersey), and San Antonio (Texas). The study found that the leaders' views were nearly opposite of those held by the American public as reported in two related publications. These community leaders know a great deal about American higher education and they support its goals but they are extremely critical of how higher education implements its avowed mission and pursues its goals. Although both leaders and the general public emphasize the importance of higher education as preparation for work, leaders stress the importance of general education and the value of courses in the liberal arts as an aid to thinking and a means of better quality of life. Access to education for most Americans is seen as a question of income but community leaders see a continued impact of past social inequities. Leaders are also more critical of the quality of undergraduate and graduate education and the level of preparation evidenced by graduates. Leaders want a more accountable system and one that renews its historic leadership role in advancing social justice. They see financial pressures as increasing and new support coalitions developing. (JLS)

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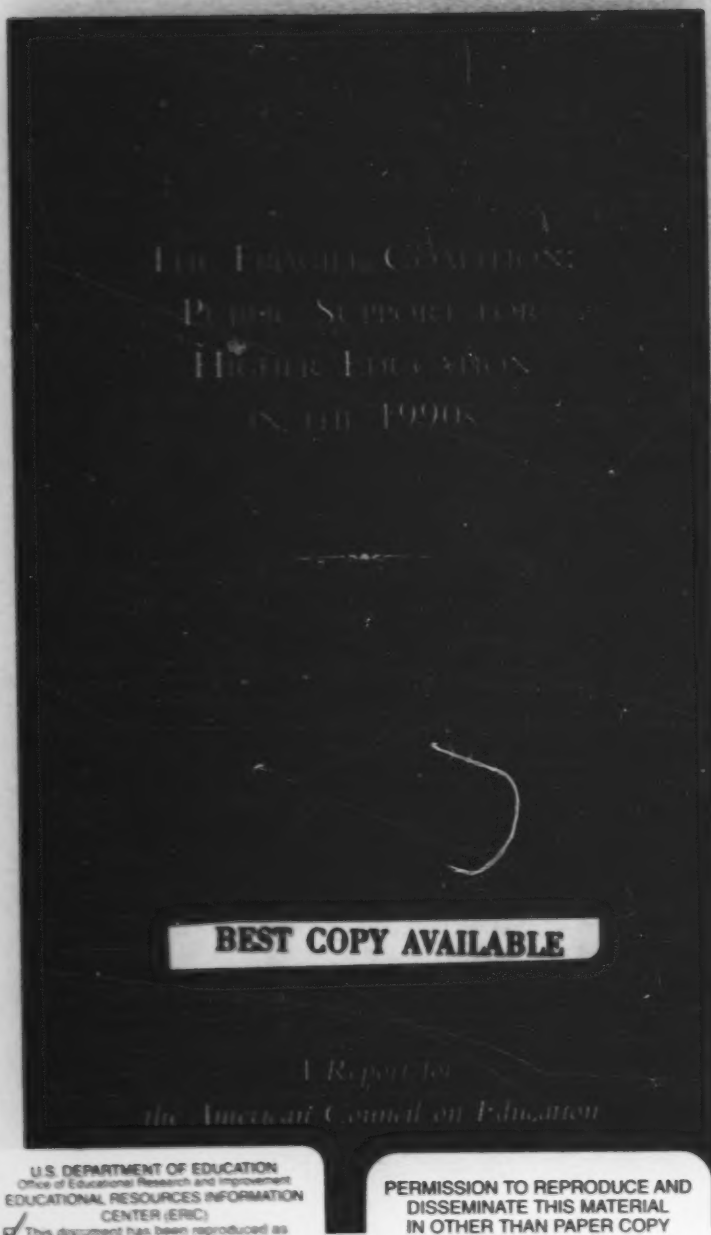

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The Fragile Coalition: Public Support for Higher Education in the 1990s

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The Fragile Coalition: Public Support for Higher Education in the 1990s

James Harvey and John Immerwahr
James Harvey & Associates
Washington, DC

A Report for
the American Council on Education

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Introduction

This is the third and final report on public perceptions of higher education prepared for the Board of Directors of the American Council on Education. The reports were prepared at the request of ACE's Division of Governmental Relations and Office of Public Affairs to provide a better picture of public opinion as higher education entered a new period of constrained budgets at the federal, state, and local levels.

The first report was presented to the Board at ACE's 75th Annual Meeting in San Diego, California, in January 1993. That document, *Goodwill and Growing Worry*, summarizes a comprehensive review of results from highly regarded, nationally representative public opinion polls completed between 1989 and 1992. (This third report updates *Goodwill and Growing Worry* by including a survey of poll findings released since 1993 in Appendix A.) Among the major findings in *Goodwill and Growing Worry*:

- Higher education enjoys a huge reservoir of public goodwill.
- A college degree is thought to be as essential to success today as a high school diploma was yesterday.
- The public is broadly committed to equity, but sees it as a function of income, not of race or gender.
- "Sticker shock" is a real phenomenon in the public mind, and people believe that costs are escalating beyond the reach of the middle class.
- People see government as an important part of the solution to the cost problem in very much the same way they see government as an important part of the solution to the health care cost problem.

The second report, *First Impressions and Second Thoughts*, describes the results of focus groups held in four cities to explore public perceptions. The focus groups were conducted between March and July 1993 in Detroit, Michigan; Memphis, Tennessee; Cherry Hill, New Jersey (the Philadelphia area); and San Antonio, Texas. The focus groups, like all focus groups, were not chosen to be nationally representative, but were thought to be reasonably representative of the communities in which they were conducted. About one-half of the respondents in the focus groups were college graduates; the remainder did not hold college degrees. The selection process for the focus groups filtered out retirees and those employed in higher education.

These sessions confirmed the poll analysis by indicating that, compared with many of the things that people on Main Street worry about today, higher education is perceived positively by the public. People are concerned that the price of a college education may spiral out of reach of the middle class; even so, they believe it still is possible for anyone to pursue a college education. Moreover, colleges are perceived as safe environments; student failure tends to be blamed on the student, not the institution; and members of the faculty are perceived as relatively benign and honest, and they are thought to be reimbursed at reasonable levels. College may be expensive, but people think the money comes from someone else's pocket (i.e., from parents).

Behind this optimistic picture, however, lie some troubling second thoughts, as documented by the focus groups:

- Most people know very little about the academic world and are not deeply concerned about it.
- In consequence, the public cannot be expected to rush to the defense of higher education when budget cutbacks threaten.
- The general public values the credential issued by the institution (i.e., the degree), not the education it provides—in part because people doubt that general education itself is of any economic value.
- Focus group members probably would support legislation to divert funds from higher education to vocational schools.
- Finally, lack of sophistication about higher education makes it easy for the public to focus on one thing that it has no trouble understanding: allegations that administrators are overpaid.

This third report, *The Fragile Coalition*, surveys a completely different "public." It summarizes the views and attitudes toward higher education of 43 leaders in the same four communities in which the focus groups were

held—Detroit, Memphis, Cherry Hill, and San Antonio. These community leaders include city council members and mayors; Fortune 500 executives and small business owners; school superintendents and medical center administrators; major manufacturers and small, high-tech entrepreneurs; religious leaders and civic boosters; as well as foundation directors, journalists, bankers, and managers of local media outlets. (See Appendix B for a complete list.) As one might expect of a leadership sample, white males predominated, but the leaders also included 10 women, seven African Americans, and four Latinos. Each leader participated in an in-depth, open-ended, confidential interview lasting from 35 minutes to one hour. The interviews were conducted either in person or by telephone.

What these people had to report represents a wake-up call for American higher education. On practically every dimension examined, their views and opinions are virtually a mirror image of those of the men and women on Main Street—i.e., the polar opposite. These respondents know a great deal about American higher education and they support its goals. Yet, despite this knowledge and support, they are extremely critical of how higher education implements its avowed mission and pursues its goals.

The Fragile Coalition

The remainder of the 1990s will, by all accounts, be a difficult time for American higher education. Already the victims of constrained federal and state budgets in the first half of the 1990s, the nation's colleges and universities face a new, potentially more hostile political climate in light of the 1994 elections.

The nation's apparent swing to the right swept into power at the federal and state levels legislators committed to less government, fewer regulations, and lower taxes. These new lawmakers already have taken the axe to funding for higher education. Equally serious: Pressures to cut federal spending further inevitably will affect state budgets, increasing competition for scarce resources.

It is worth exploring, therefore, what kind of political support higher education enjoys. The answer depends upon which group is asked the question—the general public or local leaders. Reviews of existing survey research, focus groups in four cities around the country, and a set of in-depth interviews with more than 40 leaders in the same four communities indicate that, with regard to higher education, the two groups share very little in common.

The overall picture suggests that higher education currently enjoys elements of support from both community leaders and the public, but when the two groups are viewed together, it is clear that the support is much shakier than most educators would like. Ironically, the two groups are almost mirror images—i.e., polar opposites—in terms of their understanding of higher education and their evaluation of higher education's performance.

The views of local leaders hardly could be more different from the views expressed by typical citizens in the same communities. Several themes emerged from the interviews. In what follows, the respondents are, for the most part, allowed to speak for themselves.

Support for Traditional Goals of Higher Education

During interviews, the leaders express powerful support for the traditional goals of higher education. They stress both the content of what should be taught and learned in higher education, as well as the value of a liberal education in helping develop young people's capacity to think, analyze, and grow intellectually throughout their lives.

Preparation for Work and Life

Both leaders and the general public emphasize the importance of higher education as preparation for work. However, in contrast to the general public—which often seems oblivious to the content of what is learned and much more interested in the credential—leaders (particularly employers) stress the need for specific skills in the workplace and for a professionally trained work force that can handle the demands of an increasingly complex global economy:

> *"I just attended a session on jobs for the 21st century. We need to be training people in biotechnology, nuclear science, and a host of other highly technical fields. But how are we going to address that need when kids are coming out of high school without the foundation?"*
>
> General Manager, Cable Television Company

> *"I still type on one of those typewriters where you push the carriage back with your hand, but we have to keep up with the world in which we live.... Those borders that separate us are unimportant.... World trade, NAFTA, GATT—all expose us to the need for all kinds of techniques and skills that will be essential in the future."*
>
> City Chapter Director, NAACP

> *"Across the board, a lot of business and industry people are saying, 'You're not building independent thinkers.' Graduates often don't know how to use the technical information they have. The question is not just, 'Can you run DOS?' The question is, 'Can you apply the technology?'"*
>
> CEO, Urban Chamber of Commerce

> *"A lot of people go to school and learn what's in the books. When it comes time to solve problems in the society, they are at a loss.... I don't think people have a good feel for that."*
>
> Banker and Business Leader

While the public views a degree as sufficient for success, these leaders stress that a college education is necessary, but *not* sufficient. Leaders are much more concerned with the higher-level analytical and problem-solving skills that college traditionally is thought to instill. For them, theoretical

knowledge does not necessarily compete with practical knowledge; what they seek are graduates who can see both the big picture *and*, beneath the surface, the particulars and cross-currents that go into the big picture.

These leaders, in summary, are just as concerned as members of the general public with the practical application of a college education and far more capable of articulating how that education can be put to use.

Significance of a Liberal Education

However, unlike members of the general public, leaders invariably stress the importance of general education and the value of courses in such areas as history, philosophy, and literature both as an aid to thinking and as a means to enhancing the quality of life. While many leaders brought up the personal rewards of a liberal education, many also referred to training in the humanities as benefiting society at large by fostering ideals, aspirations, and values that uplift society rather than simply maintaining it as a well-oiled machine. Likewise, they see higher education as enhancing the traditional values of independent thinking and self-reliance, thus further strengthening democracy.

They expressed these sentiments over and over again and in many different ways:

> *"Higher education has lifelong applications. Being prepared to make contributions to society comes out of a well-rounded education."*
>
> City Chapter Director, NAACP

> *"I have a liberal arts degree and I thinks it's a good foundation you can never remove."*
>
> CEO, Urban Chamber of Commerce

> *"I took liberal arts courses that had nothing to do with what I wound up doing in life and they broadened my outlook significantly. I don't want college turned into a trade school."*
>
> Editorial Columnist

> *"Higher education should do three things. It should provide tools for earning a living. It should prepare us to live in a democratic society. And it should prepare the student for life. Too often...we do not spend enough time on the spiritual, the intellectual, and the aesthetic side of life."*
>
> Municipal Judge

> *"With all four of my children, each of them was focused more on preparing for a job than they were on the education they could receive. In fact, the desire to learn for its own sake was nonexistent."*
>
> City Council Member

"My education taught me much more than broadcasting. It taught me how to live alone. How to stand on my own two feet. How to analyze problems. How to make decisions."

Radio Group Sales Executive

In brief, these leaders spontaneously express their support for precisely the mission and goals of higher education that academic leaders, at their most eloquent, espouse.

Access for Minority Students

Nothing better illustrates the cleavage between minority and majority Americans on issues related to higher education than the question of access to the campus. Majority leaders—most of whom recall a time when most mainstream colleges and universities had almost no minority presence—stress the visible difference in minority representation on campus today compared with the past, while minority respondents point to the remaining sharp differences in opportunity, access, and success, both on and off campus.

White leaders award higher education almost uniformly high marks for providing access for minority students. They believe higher education has done a good job, the situation has improved, and a great deal of financial assistance is available for minority students. However, they seem to agree that minority access remains a national problem. The biggest difficulty in ensuring access, they say, lies in the pre-collegiate preparation of minority students.

"Minority access has been improving steadily over time. Hopefully, that will continue to improve: Slowly and steadily, things are getting better."

Newspaper Publisher

"Access has dramatically improved over the last couple of decades. This represents a huge change from my own undergraduate days, when just a handful of minority kids could be found on most campuses.... There is not enough progress, but there has been progress."

Federal Presidential Appointee

"Finally, schools are responding to these issues and we have much more diversity on campus. It is getting better; but of course kids in inner-city schools are at such a disadvantage that only the brightest can shine through that environment and make it to college."

Newspaper Bureau Chief

"I think we need to get to the root of the problem. The problem starts long before we get to higher education. A black male or female growing

up in [the city] has two strikes against them unless they have very strong parents."

Founder and CEO of Restaurant Chain

"We need to spend a lot of attention on African-American men long before college. It is something that higher education needs to address, but we need to do it a lot earlier."

Vice President of Medical Center

The views of most minority respondents, however, are strikingly different. Although they acknowledge, like the Anglo respondents, that the situation has improved markedly in a generation, minority respondents insist that racism and discrimination continue to hinder minority students.

"It has been a fight all the way to get decent representation of blacks at the [university] right here, although it is much better than it used to be. They are now trying to give black kids an opportunity in medicine and dentistry. Higher education can do more to eliminate society's racism, but that's where blacks are still denied opportunity."

City Chapter Director, NAACP

"The big issue for me is the question of getting more children of color into higher education."

Vice President, Telecommunications Firm

Several respondents, however, including some minority respondents, were not satisfied to attribute remaining problems with minority access simply to inadequate public schools or recalcitrant colleges and universities. They went out of their way to ascribe remaining problems to, in part, lack of motivation on the part of the student or lack of encouragement in the home or the community.

"There are scholarships out there for minority youth. It is the middle class that is having the hard time."

Union Health Expert

"For the people I come into contact with, access has not been as much a problem as lack of desire to compete. I don't sense the determination. I see the talk, I don't see the walk.... People say, 'I don't need an education.'"

Music Director

In sum, while the access issue for most Americans is very easily reduced to a question of income, not race, for these leaders, the issue is far

more complex and subtle. A broad consensus exists among them that access remains a significant problem. Nearly universally, they rejoice over the progress made since the 1960s. And leaders of all racial backgrounds increasingly are concerned that inner-city poverty is an intractable obstacle to progress for many young people—either because it leaves them completely without the academic background needed to start or complete college, or because it fails to give them any motivation to succeed in the mainstream. But when questioned about who should be responsible for taking the next steps, these respondents split—some pointing to colleges and universities and others to students, families, and other community institutions.

Criticism about Implementation

But if these leaders generally applaud higher education's accomplishments in terms of providing minority access and demonstrate much firmer and clearer support for the goals of higher education than do members of the general public, they also are much more critical in their assessment of how well higher education appears to be implementing those goals.

These respondents have many complimentary things to say about higher education, but they also are persistently critical of several issues, some familiar and unsurprising, others much less so:

- the declining quality of graduates, whether at the baccalaureate, graduate, or professional level;
- the decaying utility and value of university research;
- low faculty productivity and the counterproductivity of tenure;
- the mishandling of issues of race and gender;
- rising tuition costs;
- poor organization and general mismanagement; and
- higher education's financial problems, for which they show little sympathy.

Preparation of Graduates

Respondents were asked quite directly whether or not they hired people and, if so, what education qualifications they sought—high school diplomas, bachelor's degrees, or graduate or professional preparation. Respondents then were asked about their satisfaction in terms of the work force preparation of the college graduates they hire.

Undergraduate Preparation

Overwhelmingly, business leaders report that they are in a buyer's market in which they can afford to demand better skills. They are willing to accept inexperience if the fundamentals are there, but too often they see the fundamentals lacking, and some doubt that experience and "seasoning" will be enough to bridge the gap.

With respect to bachelor's degree holders, the responses typically fell into two categories. On the one hand, several respondents reported being impressed with recent graduates they encountered, often because they were able to be extremely selective in terms of hiring. As employers, such respondents often reported that their new employees had reasonably high levels of skill and motivation.

> *"This company hires only college graduates. For the most part, they are very competent.... This company has 300–400 applicants for jobs every day. All have pretty much the same degrees and general background. We have the pick of the litter."*
>
> Executive, Financial Services Corporation

> *"Recent graduates here function wonderfully. A paper our size can be choosy. We pick the cream of the crop and that is what we get. I am not sure they would hire me here today with the qualifications I had fresh out of college!"*
>
> Editorial Columnist

> *"I have found the quality of the graduates almost uniformly high.... [W]e tend to hire overqualified people and then put them in unchallenging jobs.... I suspect that is true of a lot of these big employers."*
>
> Entrepreneur

> *"I don't have any real measure of their overall level of competence. Certainly in terms of my son at [a collegiate institution], he is very politically and intellectually aware—as are his classmates."*
>
> Federal Presidential Appointee

> *"I tend to hire graduates with backgrounds in health care administration or that kind of thing. I have to say that...the ones we have hired have been real crackerjacks."*
>
> Vice President of Medical Center

On the other hand, many of the leaders expressed severe misgivings about the competence of recent graduates, citing what they perceived to be a definite decline in basic skills, a weak background in the liberal arts, and a limited sense of what is required for success in the workplace.

"I used to assume that with a bachelor's degree, they would have the basic skills. But it is not consistent. I am continually surprised at what they cannot do. I think the academic rigor of the courses they take is rather shallow."

General Manager, Hotel

"It never ceases to amaze me how many college graduates cannot compose a decent letter. We find a lot of problems like that in my industry.... We tend to get people who are not academically strong. Nonetheless, even dealing with vendors, it is pretty bad."

Founder and CEO of Restaurant Chain

"Plain old writing skills are just sub-zero."

Parochial School Administrator

"I see a lot of students who do not have a foundation in basic literacy. They are technologically literate, but otherwise illiterate."

Attorney, Big Three Auto Manufacturer

"I would say that college graduates are at the 65 percent level of where they need to be in order to compete successfully in the world of work when they start."

General Manager, Cable Television Company

"...European graduates are trilingual...comfortable with diverse cultures...know a great deal about the larger world. On those dimensions, U.S. graduates are deplorable—Eurocentric, monolingual, with no sense of the cultural diversity of the world."

Vice President, International Services Corporation

"Recent graduates often have a misconception of the world of work. They feel they are going to take the world by storm. They struggle unless they realize they are going to have to buckle down.... Adaptability, openness, willingness to learn are much more important in the long run than what you know out of college."

Newspaper Publisher

These remarks, in brief, contain a common commentary: In today's world, a college degree by itself is no guarantee of the graduate's competence or knowledge.

Graduate and Professional Preparation

Perhaps more surprising than the complaints about the preparation of undergraduates were the numerous complaints about the inadequate preparation of graduate and professional degree holders, including persistent

claims that graduate and professional programs are theoretically behind the times.

Several respondents in nontechnical fields who had been in the work world for several decades or more expressed variations on a traditional complaint about higher education. In one way or another, they reported that recent undergraduate and professional school graduates had learned theory—but not how to apply that theory to the real world.

> *"I have a perception that people in higher education are out of touch with the real world. It is just a sense that there is a big gap in terms of relevance."*
>
> Entrepreneur

> *"A lot of graduates have little common sense—they don't understand that you don't burn your bridges in the business world, or make non-negotiable demands when you are just starting out."*
>
> Banker and Business Leader

However they phrased it, these respondents in effect echoed the familiar virtues of the "school of hard knocks."

In many other cases, however, a startling and different complaint emerged: Professional training on too many campuses, in too many disciplines, lags behind the latest theory. These respondents expressed their frustration that recent professional school graduates had been trained largely in outmoded theory—and they voiced their accompanying irritation that graduates had to be brought up to theoretical speed on the job.

> *"I am concerned about the graduates we see from business school. They are not up on the most recent management concepts that we use here, having to do with dialogueing and fostering teamwork. You would think academics would be on top of these concepts."*
>
> Management Consultant

> *"We had to teach graduates the latest theory. They came to us with theory that was 30 years old."*
>
> Suburban School Superintendent

> *"The quality of the teachers they are sending us in our district is a real problem.... Even the new teachers coming out are not equipped."*
>
> Urban School Superintendent

> *"A lot of these graduates have no idea what is out there. They have no understanding of the connection between individuals and larger social systems."*
>
> Director of Multi-County Social Service Agency

"In accounting training, there is just too much emphasis on technical and clerical details which you will never need—even when you first begin a job as an accountant—and not enough focus on understanding the big picture."

Founder and President, Training Corporation

"First and foremost, we hire people with professional library degrees, but there are a lot of deficiencies in their training. Often, the students are not typically that geared toward technology. They have a more traditional education.... The result is that frequently we have to untrain our new hires—and we are not unique in this."

Urban Library Director

These respondents take what traditionally is advanced as a defense of the academic world—academics may be isolated in an ivory tower and impractical, but they are on the cutting edge of the latest theory—and stand that defense on its head. Their complaint is that in terms of theory, the academy is behind the curve.

Utility and Value of Research

A different but related complaint is directed at academic research: The community leaders believe it is not very good.

Earlier focus groups revealed that people on Main Street tend to think of research in two categories—research in medicine and technology, which is thought to be good, and everything else, which is acceptable but not terribly well understood and, if truth be known, probably not terribly important.

The leadership attitude is markedly different. Many of these leaders are direct consumers of research. They read technical journals in their own fields—in education, library science, law, social science, and other areas—and apply this research in their day-to-day professional lives. They are quite familiar with university research on a first-hand basis and are perfectly comfortable making judgments about it. These judgments frequently are not terribly kind.

"I look at the fields that I work in. Ninety percent of what gets published is junk. I am not anti-research, but a lot of it is just a restatement of someone else's article."

Foundation President

"Who cares about a lot of this research? What value is it? At one of the schools here there is a fellow who does research on UFOs.... He is his institution's own little embarrassment. Because of academic freedom,

no one really challenges him. He teaches courses, published a book of interviews with people who were abducted, and was recommended for a full professorship by his colleagues."

Newspaper Bureau Chief

"A lot of research appears to be irrelevant.... Much of it represents just wasted dollars on foolish and useless research."

Evangelical Pastor

"Students miss a lot because the faculty is busy avoiding the big issues ...in favor of ferreting around in obscure corners."

Federal Presidential Appointee

"I'm not really impressed with the research I see in education. In many instances, the questions that really need to be answered are not addressed in the research. To be honest, very little use of higher education research is found in K–12."

Urban School Superintendent

"Professors specialize in something while they are doing their graduate work. As the Ph.D. has become more common, the specialization has become greater and greater, so we are ending up with all kinds of work that is so specific that it doesn't really apply."

Insurance Company Executive

The attitudes of these leaders toward research represents not simply a substantive problem for higher education, but a significant public relations dilemma. When academic institutions are criticized—as they frequently are—for ignoring student needs, particularly those of undergraduates, the typical defense is to point to the importance of research and to the contribution research makes not only to graduate education, but to better teaching across the board. However, these leaders' views indicate that the defense is unpersuasive. Leaders judge much of this research in very harsh terms. In fact, the defense—far from mollifying critics—may incense some, reminding them of yet another complaint: "Who cares about this research?"

Faculty: Productivity and Tenure

Conversations about the value of research led inexorably into discussions of how faculty spend their time. Here again, marked differences are readily discernible between how the general public views faculty members and how leadership groups view them.

Focus groups with members of the general public indicate that most people conceive of college faculty members as underpaid altruists who wear

old clothes and are content driving old cars. Leaders are much less likely to share this perception. Among leaders, a good deal of criticism is directed at faculty members. They teach too little. They spend their time on research that is not particularly important. They do not work very hard. And, they leave too much teaching to graduate assistants.

> *"I taught for nine years in the business school here. No one monitored my class during that time. Not one person came in and sat in the back of the class. No one knew what you were doing. It was anarchy."*
>
> Founder and President, Training Corporation

> *"The faculty members do not seem to have a very heavy teaching load. In fact, they have a pretty good package. They get a lot of time off. They take a lot of trips, some might call them junkets."*
>
> Program Manager, Radio Station

> *"These people have some of the best jobs in America. I went to visit a friend at the university. He left the house at 10:00 a.m., did some shopping, and got to the campus at noon. We hung around and had lunch. He taught a class at 2:00 and then left immediately to watch his son play baseball. And he is thought to be one of the hard-working, productive ones. I would hate to see the deadwood."*
>
> Federal Presidential Appointee

> *"I am worried about really large classes being taught by teaching assistants, scarcely out of college themselves and many of them foreign. Kids often cannot hear what is being said or understand it."*
>
> Vice President, Telecommunications Company

> *"They are writing and publishing and letting surrogates do the teaching."*
>
> Director of Mental Health Association

Tenure became the object of particularly caustic comments. Not a single leader gave unreserved support to tenure as a necessary mechanism for protecting academic freedom. Most considered tenure to be counter-productive and, in fact, symbolic of much of what they consider to be wrong with higher education. Leaders may not have detailed knowledge of how colleges and universities are managed and directed, but they are well aware that the major educational providers enjoy exceptional job security, apparently regardless of continued effectiveness. In general, the attitude of these leaders is: "If this is typical of how you run the rest of your enterprise, you are certainly not going to be very efficient."

> *"I am on the chancellor's advisory board.... I have told him that I think tenure does higher education a great disservice.... You practically have to*

commit a job-related felony to be fired.... As an undergraduate and a graduate student, I just saw far too many people just putting in time to believe that tenure is a good thing on campus."

Vice President, International Services Corporation

"I don't think that anyone should be guaranteed a place, based only on past performance.... Essentially, these are people who are retired on the job."

Executive, Financial Services Corporation

"Tenure involves a system where compensation and longevity are detached from performance. It is not a business-like arrangement. If the goal is to produce research and teaching, the question should be, 'What have you done lately?'"

CEO of Computer Consulting Firm

"Certainly the idea that tenure is needed to protect academic freedom and free speech is a quaint and anachronistic notion. The courts can certainly protect free speech."

Federal Presidential Appointee

Tenure may have enjoyed more support when the nation's colleges and universities were surrounded by an aura of exclusivity. But that aura is long gone. These leaders are not convinced that higher education is so different from their own enterprises that a completely counter-intuitive system—ostensibly designed to provide academic freedom but in their view largely designed to provide job security—is needed to encourage high performance.

Yet again, leaders' views of faculty productivity and related issues such as tenure are a significant problem for academic leaders. During periods of economic growth and rising government revenues, public officials may be inclined to turn a blind eye to claims that the campus does not run a very tight ship. But during tough economic times, with declining government support, public officials cannot afford to overlook any allegations of poor or unproductive use of resources. These leaders' views indicate that campuses will be expected to shape up in significant ways before elected officials provide them with additional resources.

Mishandling Race and Gender

Earlier analyses of poll results (see *Goodwill and Growing Worry)* indicated that most Americans have a quite complicated, albeit well-formed, view of issues related to equity—racial preferences, remedies for past discrimination, and, finally, attitudes toward, treatment of, and language used in discussing

minorities—or what has come to be descibed by the pejorative term "political correctness."

First, most Americans view equity through the prism of income, not the prism of race or gender. The poll results reveal that the general public is uncomfortable with the idea of preferences based on race or gender—both in college admissions and in business hiring. At the same time, these polls also make it clear that, just as there is substantial public support for student aid generally, so, too, extremely strong public support exists—about three out of four people—for special financial assistance, including scholarships, for minority youngsters with good grades. Finally, both the poll results and the focus groups indicate that most Americans are unaware of the controversies swirling around the issues of "political correctness" and do not take them seriously.

In this most sensitive area of university relations with the outside world, it is almost impossible to overstate the extent to which leaders' perceptions differ from those of the general public. Although leaders, as noted above, tend to think that huge progress has been made in terms of access for minority Americans, most also think that access, diversity, and minority representation remain significant national problems.

> "*Of course, kids in inner-city schools are at such a disadvantage that only the brightest can shine through that environment and make it to college.... Institutions are not doing enough there—they are much too much into their ivory tower.*"
>
> Newspaper Bureau Chief

> "*Something has to be done to make higher education more accessible to middle- and low-income people and to minority students.*"
>
> Entrepreneur

> "*Minority access and progress is a very real issue.... It is something that higher education needs to address, but we need to do it a lot earlier.*"
>
> Vice President of Medical Center

Moreover, these leaders almost universally believe universities have badly mishandled issues of race and gender. Unlike members of the general public, who are scarcely aware of the issue of "political correctness," leaders are intensely aware of these controversies, are quite concerned about them, and appear to believe that academic leaders have created many problems for themselves.

> "*In the workplace, it is critical to spend more time and attention on diversity. We are good at this in our company.... My sense is*

that...universities haven't dealt with these problems as well as we have. They seem to be way behind on issues of race, for example."

Corporate Human Resources Director

"Universities are bending rules that should not be bent to appease minority interests. Not disciplining kids for stealing newspapers is pretty ridiculous. To avoid a lawsuit at [institution], they agreed to pay a Hispanic kid's tuition elsewhere. That is ridiculous.... They came out looking like wimps because all they were really trying to do was avoid a lawsuit."

Newspaper Bureau Chief

"I am grappling with diversity in this company, too, and I know how hard it is. But the way the universities deal with PC has gone too far."

Newspaper Publisher

Minority leaders are particularly critical of how campuses have handled issues of race and gender. First, they refuse to let these concerns be defined in terms of "political correctness"; they insist that the issue is diversity. Second, they point to what they see as serious shortcomings in how well campuses have prepared for a more diverse student body.

"I feel that Fortune 500 companies are probably ahead of the universities when it comes to dealing with issues of race. I know that the corporations deal with issues of race—in terms of recruitment of minorities—very aggressively."

Music Director

"If you create separate ethnic courses, the majority will never take them. I don't think many schools have looked at core courses and made diversity a priority."

Urban School Superintendent

"Universities say they want a multicultural environment, they want people to get along and understand each other. But they don't do anything to encourage it. They assume that if kids go to school together, go to class together, run into each other on campus, then everything will work out fine. That's not how the world works."

Vice President, Telecommunications Company

"We live in an increasingly multicultural world. It is foolish to try to even say or think otherwise. The sooner we have curricula that show diversity, the sooner people see we are more alike than unlike, the sooner they will appreciate the truly beautiful diversity we do have."

Banker and Business Leader

These comments make it quite apparent that many local leaders feel confident discussing these difficulties because they consider themselves to be familiar with identical problems in their own professional environments. In effect, respondents are not grading higher education against abstract concepts but against precisely the same set of issues in their own working lives.

Correctly or incorrectly, they believe that they and their organizations respond much more effectively to these difficult dilemmas than do educators or academic institutions. Indeed, it is clear that many believe academic institutions have oscillated between two extremes: first, being insensitive to the potential for problems while ignoring such obvious needs as diversity workshops—and then capitulating unwisely as soon as a crisis develops.

Rising Tuition Costs

Leaders also express some concerns about costs, but far fewer of them are worried than among members of the general public. Many of these respondents enjoy high incomes, and many already have put their children through prestigious private or public universities. Most do not suffer from the kind of "sticker shock" noted among our public respondents. Leaders in Texas were most relaxed about college costs; those in Cherry Hill were most concerned.

> *"Most of my friends have sent their kids to private schools through high school. In these cases, going to college will probably be less expensive because [institution] is pretty affordable. We look forward to our kids getting out of high school."*
>
> Founder and CEO of Restaurant Chain

> *"When I think of higher education, as the father of two, I do think of the phenomenal costs of it. The cost is so high that you have to make sure you use it appropriately, that you find the right place for your kids. Family funds are now so strained that this is a real issue."*
>
> Newspaper Bureau Chief

Nevertheless, despite their ability to manage the costs, these leaders express considerable concern about the social costs of high tuitions—too many people cannot afford the expense.

> *"Cost is a huge concern. A college education is a huge expense. I was one of seven children, and only three of us were able to go to college."*
>
> Entrepreneur

"My daughter will probably do four years of college and then three or four years of graduate school. This will cost me close to a quarter of a million dollars. It is outrageous; they are pricing themselves out of the market."

CEO of a High-Tech Training Firm

"The costs are astronomic. To be able to fund a program for a four-year education, even in a public school, a family would have to save something like $300 per month, per year, even from birth. How many people do you know who can do that?"

Financial Adviser

"Health costs are too high because you have so many third-party payers. This applies to higher education. They have tax support. They have support from tuition. They have support from scholarships. So they have not had to face the kind of discipline that private enterprise has."

Attorney for Big Three Automaker

In sum, despite complaining, local leaders report that they personally can, for the most part, carry the cost burden. But they are concerned that many others cannot. And underneath these concerns is a thinly veiled, unstated criticism—a sense that the high costs of college attendance are at least partially to be explained by a certain lack of accountability and discipline on the part of higher education institutions.

Organization and Management

When leaders consider how higher education manages its affairs, the veil is removed from the criticisms. Once again, management is a subject on which many of these leaders feel they are better equipped to comment than academic leaders. These respondents often are managers themselves, and frequently they deal with precisely the same kinds of problems confronting higher education.

Against this background, several comments stood out. Most striking were statements that, although apparently contradictory at first blush, could be reconciled as two separate and distinct criticisms: Academic institutions are simultaneously too businesslike and not businesslike enough.

That is, academic institutions have inappropriately adopted the ethos of the market. At the same time, they are not well managed. In support of these observations, the respondents offered numerous examples to illustrate how poorly run and managed they consider academic institutions to be.

Inappropriate Market Orientation

A striking number of these interviewees express a nagging worry that in the interests of becoming more fully integrated into the larger economy, academic institutions are inappropriately adopting the outlook and values of the market.

> *"I guess I have seen higher education become much more commercialized.... The gray flannel suits have taken over in higher education....*
>
> Federal Presidential Appointee

> *"The colleges have become bottom liners."*
>
> Music Director

> *"Interestingly, our universities are becoming more like businesses—they operate the same way."*
>
> Management Consultant

> *"They have a lower concern for ethics. The major universities have not resisted the commercialization of the law."*
>
> Attorney, Big Three Automaker

A "Numbers Game"

But, if academic institutions are perceived as being more attuned to the "bottom line" than they were in the past, they also are criticized for being poorly run. Significantly, many leaders accuse higher education of being preoccupied with a numbers game—paying too much attention to largely meaningless data and mechanistic measures of output without focusing on quality.

> *"I have the feeling that universities act like the student is on a conveyor belt. The belt is moving and it doesn't matter whether you are grasping anything as it moves along. You come off at the end. We are thinking too much about turning out people with degrees, and not enough about whether they are learning anything."*
>
> Mayor

> *"I know several faculty members at universities in this area. All they are interested in is getting their numbers up.... The way departments are funded seems to me to be largely a numbers game."*
>
> Personnel Director, Large Travel Agency

> *"The story I like is that when they were going to build a new administration building at the university, they wrote to Oxford and said, 'Tell us*

about your administration building.' The Oxford people wrote back and said, 'What is an administration building?'"

Foundation President

Concrete Illustrations and Direct Comparisons

To back up these criticisms, many of the leaders compared the performance of their own organizations directly with the performance of academic institutions on essentially the same task.

"The president said, 'In order to turn it around, I really need to get rid of my athletic director, a lovely person and everyone likes him, but he just can't hack it.' I agreed with him. Then he said, 'I'll just have to make him my special assistant and charge his salary to athletics.' I'm sorry, but in industry, he would have been history and no question about it."

Newspaper Publisher

"We compete with a university-sponsored radio station with roughly the same format. They have a much stronger signal and much greater outlay than we do. But we are beating their brains out even in the university town."

Program Manager, Radio Station

"I can tell you one thing about the universities. I know some of the librarians at the college library. They get paid a lot more than we do here and they don't do as good a job."

Urban Library Director

"I look at universities as my competitors.... I do a better job in training executives than the universities do. Our approach is more focused, takes less time, and we charge the customer less money."

Founder and President, Training Corporation

"I get calls from black student associations all the time to come and talk to the students about black history. The professors have no understanding of the heritage of the ancestors of African-American students. They think that if they did not study it in graduate school, it never really happened."

Retired Federal Reserve Board Member

In a different era, many of these comments might be dismissed as anecdotal or ill-informed. But when so many well-informed respondents offer essentially the same management criticism and are able to make direct comparisons with their own experience, it becomes apparent that leaders'

perceptions that institutions are poorly managed are broad and deep. When it comes to managing large, complex institutions—similar to large, complex organizations in the private sector—academic administrators are not doing a very good job, these leaders believe.

Little Sympathy for Higher Education's Financial Problems

The leaders stressed the degree to which their own enterprises and others have been restructured and downsized over the last several years. As a result, they have little sympathy for complaints from higher education officials that times are tough and sacrifices are required. They sense, in other words, that higher education has had to be far less accountable than many other institutions—and has been able to avoid the harsh measures and fiscal discipline forced on others.

> "At a *local university, they gave a going-away gift to the president of $300,000 on the grounds that he had never taken a sabbatical.... Corporate America is downsizing; there is this terrible anxiety about job security everywhere. Yet colleges merrily increase their tuition and pay administrators these princely sums.*"
>
> Newspaper Bureau Chief

> "*We have had to get smarter, do more with less, and keep costs down. Universities will have to do the same. My sense is that they are not particularly well managed—and I say that from the point of view of the health care industry, with its own tradition of poor management that we had to overcome.*"
>
> Vice President of Medical Center

> "*Look at how some of these buildings are not used for 90 days out of the year. If this were General Motors, stockholders would fire them.*"
>
> Mayor

> "*If I were to look at the operation of the university, I am sure I would find a lot of duplication. In a sense, a university resembles a government bureaucracy, with politics, warring fiefdoms, redundancy, and duplication of services.*"
>
> CEO of Computer Consulting Firm

In brief, perhaps as a result of the many criticisms outlined earlier—lack of budget discipline and consequent steep tuition increases, questions about faculty productivity and research utility, over-reliance on tenure, and poor management—most of these community leaders express very little sympathy for higher education's financial difficulties.

Other Concerns

The views outlined and described above, while not universal, were voiced by most respondents. In addition, a number of other concerns, raised more sporadically, appeared to have enough emphasis and energy to merit the attention of higher education officials. These include:

- mixed reviews for community colleges;
- concerns of Evangelical Christians and the Christian right;
- anxiety about the future of historically black colleges and universities; and
- potential conflict between the funding needs of higher education and those of public schools.

Mixed Reviews for Community Colleges

Community colleges appear to be a bit of a mystery to both members of the general public and local leaders. Both groups voice contradictory opinions about these institutions, with the views of leaders being, perhaps, the most ambivalent.

From leaders, two somewhat different perspectives can be gathered. Several of our respondents suggested that community colleges are rather poorly defined institutions, really an extension of high school rather than an alternative to four-year colleges. Moreover, these leaders also complained that community colleges do a very poor job of providing people the first two years of a traditional college education and then helping students transfer to a four-year campus—a complaint nearly universally voiced by African-American respondents.

> *"I have not come to grips with what I think about community colleges. When I think of 'higher education,' I think of a four-year institution. Community colleges...are not meeting their transfer function. This is a particular issue for people of color, many of whom use the community college as their entry point, but they get derailed along the way."*
>
> Vice President, Telecommunications Company

> *"It is a stopping place rather than a stepping stone. It raises expectations which are not realized."*
>
> Attorney for Big Three Automaker

On the other hand, the transfer function aside, community colleges get very high marks for vocational and technical training.

"Some of their technical programs are excellent. The local culinary program is as good as any in the country, including the Culinary Institute of New York."

Founder and CEO of Restaurant Chain

"Our hospital hires community college graduates in paraprofessional areas and they appear to be well trained. We have been pleased with them."

Vice President of Medical Center

"Most of the people I hire for technical work come out of community college programs. They have had excellent training."

Management Consultant

The Christian Right and Higher Education

To date, the Christian right has devoted most of its education energy to public schools, from kindergarten through grade 12 (K–12). Many public school administrators claim that evangelical Christians have been responsible for quite a lot of mischief in public education, fomenting opposition to national school reform, encouraging a "back to basics" movement, and creating major political confrontations over everything from history standards and evolution to sex education and multicultural curricula. Evangelical Christians say they have been motivated by the desire to protect children and families from public educators intent on abandoning traditional American values.

These leadership interviews indicate that some members of the Christian right are beginning to think through the implications of a similar set of issues in higher education.

"I am upset about the things I am hearing. At [a local institution], I understand that they will now have a condom fee which you have to pay when you register, whether you want them or not. I also hear you will be required to take a course in multiculturalism."

Vice President, Insurance Company

"If you look at history, you will see that institutions of higher education were founded to be values-based biblical institutions. I think the root issue is that most of these institutions are now dens of secular humanism.... Situational ethics has become the norm."

Evangelical Pastor

"There was a recent flap about a textbook which I followed. It had material on an 'intelligent design theory' which the experts complained was just creationism by another name. The point is that there is a trickle-

down effect. The views of university researchers end up in high school textbooks. I would just like to see more balance and fairness."

CEO of Computer Consulting Firm

Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Without exception, when local leaders who are African American were asked about issues in higher education, the status and future of historically black colleges and universities became a topic of discussion. The topic is a front-burner issue in Southern states—because a higher education desegregation case decided by the Supreme Court in 1992 (*U.S. v. Fordice*) raised the question of how historically black institutions could continue to be supported in a desegregated state system.

"I feel very strongly about the existence and continuation of black colleges because America has not given black kids the opportunities they need. I have fought for integration at all levels, but somehow our kids fall through the cracks without the kind of nurturing that black institutions provide."

City Chapter Director, NAACP

"The record shows that graduates of black institutions such as myself are much more likely to continue their education and receive graduate and professional degrees."

Vice President, Telecommunications Company

"We have lived in very upscale, middle-income communities. My son attended Hampton. He really feels that the experience let him get in touch with who he is as an African American. I agree with him. The experience was very good for him."

Urban School Superintendent

"I'm not just talking about a nurturing academic environment. I'm also talking about the support network.... To what extent, when the day is over, do you get to meet with faculty informally?"

Banker and Business Leader

Potential Conflict Between Higher Education and Public Schools

For most of these leaders, it is impossible to discuss higher education independent of the problems faced by American public schools, particularly inner-city schools.

In many ways, this works to the advantage of higher education. People think well of higher education, both because it contrasts favorably

with primary and secondary schools and because some of the problems they identify in higher education can be blamed on inadequate earlier preparation. As one respondent put it:

> *"The biggest problem is the quality of work in elementary and secondary schools. Thus, in the first year of college, a lot of remedial work is required. People don't have the basics when they go to college."*
>
> Suburban School Superintendent

But several of these leaders took this line of thinking a step further. They appeared willing to argue that since the most significant educational problems are located in the public schools, it might be time to think of shifting resources from higher education to the elementary and secondary school years. In the competition for scarce resources, this argument goes, K–12 programs have the more compelling claim, since improvements at the elementary and secondary levels ultimately will benefit higher education as well.

> *"If you could give all of us a Harvard education as grade schoolers and high schoolers, our world would benefit."*
>
> Banker and Business Leader

> *"It is ironic that the public image of education in America is that our higher education system is the best in the world, but K–12 education is terrible. I am beginning to have second thoughts about all of that. Dropout rates are too high in higher education. Costs are out of control. And how they spend their money is a problem."*
>
> Vice President, Telecommunications Company

> *"Colleges are getting a lot of support and it is after the fact, when the damage has already been done in the early years. It is like gearing up a manufacturing plant to make a high-quality product when you don't have the raw materials going in."*
>
> City Council Member

> *"The big problems are in public education. We need to deal with that first."*
>
> Founder and CEO of Restaurant Chain

Implications

These respondents represent an important group in American society. While theirs may be a minority, albeit highly influential, point of view, they are likely to be people at the cutting edge of defining the public agenda. They not only enjoy access to opinion pages, news outlets, corporate boardrooms, and city council and legislative chambers, but in many cases they actually manage or oversee the important roles these institutions play in shaping public opinion. They are, therefore, highly likely to be able to help mold and lead the thinking of a much broader and larger public.

As this review makes clear, these community leaders are inclined to believe that the problem is not so much access or cost, but higher education's very structure. Leaders are not simply seeking ways to pay for it, but are searching for ways to encourage higher education to make changes itself. Moreover, they are neither shy nor bashful in their thinking: They are inclined to want to get inside the higher education system and start telling academic professionals how to manage their affairs.

Given the volatility of people's opinions and the speed with which perceptions change, developing hard and fast conclusions on the basis of poll reviews, focus groups, and a limited number of interviews with leaders in a few cities is a risky business. Nonetheless, several significant implications stand out from this review.

- Leaders perceive that the academy's monopoly on knowledge has been broken.
- Community leaders want a more accountable system.
- Higher education will be challenged to renew its historic leadership role in advancing social justice.
- Financial pressures on higher education are likely to increase.

- Historic support roles have been reversed.
- A fragile coalition of support for higher education exists, oriented around "people needs," not academic preferences.
- Fending off regulatory intrusion will require nurturing that fragile coalition.

Breaking the Monopoly on Knowledge

Conventional wisdom has held that, whatever strengths or weaknesses higher education may possess in relation to other institutions, it is supreme in at least one area—the possession of knowledge. Other institutions may have more power. They may hold greater riches. They may even possess more practical experience. Higher education, however, has gone unchallenged in its ability to process information, generate knowledge, and alter our perceptions of reality.

In these interviews, it became quite clear that, at least in the perception of these respondents, this superiority no longer exists. Many of those interviewed consider themselves to be in knowledge-intensive fields, and they view higher education professionals as competitors rather than superiors—indeed, sometimes even as inferiors. Almost all of the respondents hold a graduate or professional degree and many have taught on campus. Several respondents have worked with local higher education institutions to upgrade particular programs in their areas, and many supervise interns from local universities.

To put this new attitude in historical perspective, it is interesting to compare the current situation to the time, a generation or two ago, when the school teacher often was the best-educated person in a local community, frequently one of the few professionals in the neighborhood—along with the priest, minister, or rabbi and the local doctor—who had earned a college degree. These professionals enjoyed the high status that corresponded with their level of educational attainment. Today, in contrast, public school teaching is one of the few professional positions requiring only a bachelor's degree, and teachers no longer enjoy the respect and status they once commanded.

In similar fashion, more recently, college professors and academic administrators may have claimed a certain respect on the basis of possessing very advanced levels of education and prestigious graduate degrees. But that mark of attainment counts for little among the respondents in this study. Many of the respondents hold professional degrees or earned doctorates themselves. Far from deferring to the superior knowledge and experience of academics, they are likely to expect academics to defer to them.

It is precisely this closing of the educational gap between higher education professionals and other local leaders that seems to generate the attitudes observed in this investigation.

A More Accountable System

Although leaders' suggestions for change are neither completely articulated nor perhaps even fully focused, a few themes emerge from these interviews. First, community leaders appear to expect much better performance from American higher education. They want higher education to be more rigorous and more academic—simultaneously producing students with both a firmer foundation in the liberal arts and a more up-to-date grasp of what is going on in professional and technical fields.

Second, community leaders feel they often have as much to teach students and professionals in higher education as do academics. They frequently are attracted to internship and partnership programs where students will learn in the workplace, and they generally express interest in far more partnerships between the private sector and the academic world, partnerships in which they have as much to offer as their academic colleagues.

Above all, these leaders want a more accountable system, one that reliably produces graduates with the skills and competence promised in college catalogs, supports useful research, and worries about faculty productivity. Recent studies of attitudes toward public schools indicate that elementary and secondary educators lost a great deal of public support when the public began to believe that school leaders, along with teachers and administrators in the trenches, were not interested in accountability. Teacher tenure in public schools is a sore subject with many people—and was brought into these conversations occasionally by these leaders in discussing tenure in higher education. The attitude of many people is quite simple, if in academic eyes simplistic: To improve K–12 education and simultaneously save some money, a useful first step would be to fire some of the most unproductive teachers. These community leaders are inclined to draw very much the same conclusion in thinking about higher education.

Affirmative Action and Social Justice

As these interviews were completed, a watershed election in American politics also drew to a close—the 1994 mid-term elections, which turned control of both houses of Congress over to the Republican Party for the first time in 40 years. Almost immediately, the new congressional majority began to question the use of affirmative action and preferences based on

race or gender in education, employment, and government contracting. They were joined, in very short order, by President Clinton, who announced that the White House would conduct a review of federal affirmative action programs to identify those that had worked and those that might need to be changed or eliminated.

This entire national debate, as it developed in 1995, was pre-figured in one of the earlier reports in this series, *Goodwill and Growing Worry*:

> Based on these poll results, it appears clear that the general public is uncomfortable with the idea of preferences based on race or gender. This is true both in college admissions and in business hiring practices. There can be no doubt that politicians who criticized affirmative action during this period [1989–92] as an effort to establish "quotas," or as "reverse discrimination" and the like, knew exactly what they were doing. They were pushing a very hot political button.

It needs to be said that the confluence of three factors—politicians' looking askance at affirmative action, public discomfort with the perception of preferential treatment, and the disenchantment of leaders with how well academics have handled issues of race and gender—poses a powerful challenge to higher education's historic leadership role in the last generation of advancing social justice for minority Americans.

Responding effectively to this challenge will be difficult, but it can be made somewhat easier if academic leaders keep several things in mind. The American public does not believe anyone should be denied the opportunity to attend college simply because he or she cannot afford it. Americans support special scholarships for minority students with good grades. And there is some evidence that the American people are not opposed to giving race, ethnicity, class, or income some consideration in admissions and hiring decisions. What upsets the public is the belief that, under affirmative action, race overwhelms every other consideration.

Finally, despite public criticisms of affirmative action and preferences, and leaders' criticisms of how well higher education has managed issues of race and gender, neither the general public nor these leaders are "know-nothings." The public believes in fairness. Leaders understand the imperative to create institutions that are comfortable with diversity. Both the public and these leaders are likely to be quite supportive of higher education's affirmative action efforts if academic leaders can define the terms of the discussion. Instead of letting opponents define affirmative action under the rubric of "special privilege"—that is, as being in some way unfair to white males—academic leaders must define the issue as one of fairness for *all* Americans.

Financial Pressures Likely to Increase

Among these leaders, cost and management issues come across as a sort of Achilles' heel for higher education. Most leaders are becoming aware of the fact that the cost of financing a college degree easily can approach the cost of purchasing a home. Business leaders, acutely market conscious, think of it in market terms. How many people can afford this? Shouldn't this new necessity be more affordable? How did this situation develop? What can be done about it? Asking the questions is easy. Answering them is hard work. Some of these leaders are beginning to demand answers.

These questions add up to a sense that financial pressures are likely to continue to grow and intensify in the world of American higher education. The leaders demonstrate little interest in helping higher education obtain additional external funding to stave off its budget crisis. Their attitude appears to be: First things first. Fix these other (expensive) problems, and then we'll discuss what else might be needed.

Historic Support Roles Reversed

Perhaps the most surprising implication to emerge from this work is the inescapable conclusion that historic support roles for American higher education have been reversed. At one time, members of the general public were likely to be the critics of the campus, and local, state, and national leaders were likely to be defenders. Even when the "common man" (or woman) attacked the campus as isolated or elite, community leaders always could explain what was important about higher education, how it was special, and why it deserved support.

Today, the community leader is much more likely to be the critic and the average citizen to be the supporter.

The Fragile Coalition

This three-part project reveals genuine respect, affection, and goodwill for American higher education. The American public and community leaders both understand the importance of higher education to the nation's well-being and want it to succeed.

But this junction of leaders and the public in support of American higher education constitutes a very fragile coalition. On the one hand, the general public—which neither knows very much about the nation's colleges and universities nor cares very much about their goals—is generally inclined to support higher education. On the other hand, leaders know a great deal about these institutions and fully endorse their goals and academic mission—but they are inclined to be very critical of the institutions' performance.

These mirror images mean, in effect, that practically any criticism of American higher education will evoke a defense from one part of the coalition or the other, either local leaders or the general public. Unfortunately, the converse also is true: practically any criticism will strike a responsive chord somewhere in higher education's various "publics."

What is striking about this coalition is that it develops not around issues near and dear to the hearts of academic leaders (e.g., academic freedom, tenure, research, the graduate enterprise, and the need for additional funds), but around issues near and dear to the hearts of average citizens and the leaders who represent them (e.g., cost, affordability, the absolute need for a degree, the quality of undergraduate preparation, the integrity of the degree, and the need to "do more with less").

In fact, academic freedom, tenure, research, graduate education, and additional support are conspicuous by the extent to which they do not resonate well with either the general public or local leaders. Members of the general public do not understand these issues and make no pretense that they are qualified to judge them. Local leaders, on the other hand, understand them quite well, but they now appear inclined to reject the academy's rationale for them.

Fending off Regulatory Intrusion

These implications signify the very real possibility that higher education faces not only increasing financial pressures in the years ahead, but also increasing regulatory pressure.

With a growing public consensus that a college degree is essential to a young person starting out in life today, public officials may be inclined to try to regulate higher education in the future just as tightly as they have regulated public schools in the past. (And the general public may be inclined to support such regulation. As Item 11 in Appendix A indicates, 83 percent of Americans feel that the government should take either a "great deal" or a "fair amount" of responsibility for providing a college education for those who want it.)

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that too much is at stake in this entire discussion, for too many constituents, to contemplate any other inclination on the part of officeholders. The most obvious and immediate threat is to public institutions of higher education. If college costs continue to spiral out of reach of middle-class families, state legislators almost inevitably will be drawn to such issues as faculty workload, institutional productivity, and the balance between and among undergraduate instruction, graduate instruction, and research. Independent colleges and universities might insulate themselves more readily from these kinds of pressures, but

they are likely to be increasingly vulnerable to pressure from governmental agencies that administer student aid programs.

Hence, higher education's Golden Age is over in many senses. It is over in terms of finances. It is over in terms of leaders' uncritical approbation of the work of the nation's colleges and universities. And it may be over in terms of freedom from regulatory overload. (Academic leaders, convinced that their institutions already are the victims of overregulation, need to understand that compared with public schools, higher education remains an unregulated paradise.)

Against that backdrop, fending off regulatory intrusion will require attending to the desires and demands of the fragile coalition. The general public does not want higher education managed by bureaucrats any more than it wanted health care managed by bureaucrats, as was demonstrated in the health care reform debate of 1994. People want access to these institutions for their children, at a price they can afford.

Likewise, community leaders do not want politicians defining priorities for academic institutions. They want institutions that live up to the lofty promises that made them so attractive in the first place—an emphasis on undergraduate teaching, high-quality research, and public service joined to genuine public needs.

Higher education's best defense against the threat of regulatory intrusion is a convincing demonstration that it can live up to the promises it has always been quick to make, but sometimes slower to keep.

Appendices

Appendix A

Recent Survey Research Findings

To update its earlier review of survey research findings, Harvey & Associates initiated a search to discover significant polling results since *Goodwill and Growing Worry* was provided to the Board of Directors of the American Council on Education.

This search uncovered 18 additional items in 15 separate polls completed between January 1993 and December 1994. These items are reproduced below following some general observations about what the search reveals.

General Observations

1. The public is more convinced than ever that a college degree is essential for economic success in today's world (Item 1).
2. At the same time, people are convinced that a degree is only a necessary condition for success and will not guarantee it. The most important factor is still hard work (Item 2).
3. College costs remain a major problem, especially for those with children (Items 3 & 4). Support for the idea that children should pay for at least part of the costs of their education is strong (Items 5 & 6).
4. National service programs continue to demonstrate remarkable popularity (Items 7, 8, 9, & 10).
5. People continue to believe that government bears some responsibility for providing a college education (Item 11).

6. Support for cutting federal aid to higher education is nonexistent, but only a minority support increasing aid (Items 12 & 13).
7. Confidence in college teachers remains relatively high (Items 14 & 15).
8. About half of all Americans believe white males have an easier time obtaining college admission than minorities or women. At the same time, three-quarters of Americans oppose entry preferences for equally qualified black males for college or the work force (Items 16, 17, & 18).

Item 1: Value of a College Degree
Who would probably have an easier time getting ahead financially in our society today: someone with a college degree, or someone with a high school diploma?

Subpopulation:	Asked of half sample
Responses:	
College degree:	82%
High school diploma:	3
No difference:	14
Don't know:	2
Survey Organization:	Barna Research Group
Population:	National adult
Population Size:	1,205
Interview Method:	Telephone
Beginning Date:	July 1993
Ending Date:	July 1993
Source Document:	*The Barna Report 1994–1995: Virtual America*
Date of Source Document:	July 1993

Item 2: What it Takes to Get Ahead

Please tell me which two or three of these qualities are the most likely to lead to financial success: family wealth, intelligence, street smarts, connections to important people, hard work, willingness to take risks, luck, ambition, a college education, ruthlessness, guts, careful planning.

Responses:

Family wealth	12%
Intelligence	34
Street smarts	5
Connections	15
Hard work	59
Willingness to take risks	15
Luck	14
Ambition	37
College education	31
Ruthlessness	2
Guts	5
Careful planning	42
None	1
Don't know	2

(Adds to more than 100 due to multiple responses.)

Survey Organization:	Roper Starch Worldwide
Research Sponsor:	*Worth Magazine*
Population:	National adult
Population Size:	2,000
Interview Method:	Personal
Beginning Date:	November 6, 1993
Ending Date:	November 13, 1993
Source Document:	*Survey of America's Inner Financial Life*
Date of Source Document:	March 23, 1994

Item 3: Difficulty Getting a College Education
(Here are some problems that the nation faces. In your view, has each one become better, become worse, or stayed about the same in the past few years?): getting a college education for kids from average families.

Responses:

Become worse	50%
Become better	19
Stayed the same	25
Not sure	6

Survey Organization: Yankelovich Partners Inc.
Research Sponsor: *Time*, Cable News Network
Population: National adult
Population Size: 800
Interview Method: Telephone
Beginning Date: October 11, 1994
Ending Date: October 12, 1994
Source Document: *Time*/CNN/Yankelovich Partners
Date of Source Document: October 19, 1994

Item 4: Worry about College Costs
As I read a list of concerns about raising children, please tell me how worried you are about each one. How about... the cost of their college education? Does this worry you a lot, a little, or not at all?

Responses:

A lot	70%
A little	24
Not at all	6

Survey Organization: Princeton Survey Research Associates
Research Sponsor: *Newsweek*
Population: National adult parents (see note)
Population Size: 752
Interview Method: Telephone
Beginning Date: April 25, 1993
Ending Date: May 4, 1993
Source Document: Princeton Survey Research Associates/ *Newsweek*
Date of Source Document: May 1993

Study Note: National sample of adult parents with children ages 16 or less in household. A separate sample of 251 children ages 10–16 years old was conducted and included in the same questions. The children's results are available from the Roper Center.

Item 5: Should Children Contribute to Costs?
What percentage of their own college education should children pay?

Responses:

None	10%
1–10%	11
11–20	7
21–30	14
31–40	3
41–50	29
Over 50	8
Not sure	18
(Mean = 35 percent)	

Survey Organization:	Louis Harris and Associates
Research Sponsor:	Lutheran Brotherhood
Population:	National adult heads of households
Population Size:	1,007
Interview Method:	Telephone
Beginning Date:	July 27, 1993
Ending Date:	August 8, 1993
Source Document:	*Money and Today's Family*
Date of Source Document:	September 1, 1994

Item 6: Parental Responsibility to Contribute
Do you feel that it is the responsibility of parents to contribute toward their children's college educations, or not?

Responses:

Yes	90%
No	9
Not sure	1

Survey Organization:	Louis Harris and Associates
Research Sponsor:	Lutheran Brotherhood
Population:	National adult heads of households
Population Size:	1,007
Interview Method:	Telephone
Beginning Date:	July 27, 1993
Ending Date:	August 8, 1993
Source Document:	*Money and Today's Family*
Date of Source Document:	September 1, 1994

Item 7: Value of National Service Plan

Here are a few laws Congress passed last year (1993). For each one, please tell me whether you think it will make things significantly better in this country, somewhat better, somewhat worse, or significantly worse: a national service plan to provide young Americans with some financial aid for college in exchange for two years of service in schools, hospitals, and other institutions.

Responses:

Significantly better	46%
Somewhat better	42
Somewhat worse	6
Significantly worse	3
No effect	1
Not sure	2

Survey Organization:	Yankelovich Partners Inc.
Research Sponsor:	*Time*, Cable News Network
Population:	National adult
Population Size:	1,000
Interview Method:	Telephone
Beginning Date:	January 17, 1994
Ending Date:	January 18, 1994
Source Document:	*Time*/CNN/Yankelovich Partners
Date of Source Document:	January 24, 1994

Item 8: Favor or Oppose National Service

President Clinton has proposed a national service program to help young people pay for college. Under this program, anyone over age 17 could work in a public service position for one or two years and earn up to $10,000 credit toward the cost of a college education. Do you favor or oppose such a program?

Responses:

Favor	81%
Oppose	14
Don't know	5

Survey Organization:	Gallup Organization
Research Sponsor:	Phi Delta Kappa
Population:	National adult
Population Size:	1,306
Interview Method:	Telephone
Beginning Date:	May 21, 1993
Ending Date:	June 9, 1993
Source Document:	*Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, 1993*
Date of Source Document:	September 28, 1993

Item 9: Approve or Disapprove of National Service

Do you approve or disapprove of Bill Clinton's proposal to provide college loans to students while allowing them to repay the debt by performing two years of national service? (If approve or disapprove) Do you (approve/disapprove) strongly or do you (approve/disapprove) somewhat?

Responses:

Approve strongly	42%
Approve somewhat	32
Disapprove somewhat	10
Disapprove strongly	11
Don't know	6

Survey Organization:	*Los Angeles Times*
Population:	National adult
Population Size:	1,733
Interview Method:	Telephone
Beginning Date:	January 14, 1993
Ending Date:	January 17, 1993
Source Document:	*Los Angeles Times*

Item 10: Favor or Oppose National Service

Here are some education programs currently being advanced by the federal government. As I read off each program, would you tell me whether you favor or oppose it: assistance with high school students' college expenses in return for performing some kind of public service.

Responses:

Favor	81%
Oppose	17
Don't know	2

Survey Organization:	Gallup Organization
Research Sponsor:	Phi Delta Kappa
Population:	National adult
Population Size:	1,326
Interview Method:	Telephone
Beginning Date:	May 10, 1994
Ending Date:	June 8, 1994
Source Document:	*Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, 1994*
Date of Source Document:	August 25, 1994

Item 11: Responsibility of Government
(Some people say that government should meet certain needs in society. Other people say that individuals and businesses should meet these needs for themselves.) How much responsibility do you think the government should take for providing a college education for those who want it—a great deal of responsibility, a fair amount, not much, or no responsibility at all?

Responses:

Great deal	42%
Fair amount	41
Not much	10
None	6
Don't know/refused	1

Survey Organization:	Gallup Organization
Research Sponsor:	Cable News Network, *USA Today*
Population:	National adult
Population Size:	1,003
Interview Method:	Telephone
Beginning Date:	March 22, 1993
Ending Date:	March 24, 1993
Source Document:	Gallup/CNN/*USA Today*
Date of Source Document:	March 1993

Item 12: Favor Decreasing College Student Loans?
(A number of policies have been proposed in order to reduce the federal deficit. If the next Congress decides to address the problem of the deficit, would you favor or oppose each of the following policies that might be proposed?): decrease federal aid for college student loans.

Responses:

Favor	24%
Oppose	76

Survey Organization:	KRC Communications Research
Research Sponsor:	Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, Harvard School of Public Health
Population:	National adults who voted Nov. 8, 1994
Population Size:	1,203
Interview Method:	Telephone
Beginning Date:	November 8, 1994
Ending Date:	November 8, 1994
Source Document:	Kaiser/Harvard Election Night Survey
Date of Source Document:	November 15, 1994

Item 13: Increase Spending for Financial Aid?
If you were making up the federal budget this year (1994), would you increase spending for financial aid for college students, decrease spending for financial aid for college students, or keep spending the same for this?

Responses:

Increase	41%
Keep same	43
Decrease	13
Don't know	3

Survey Organization:	Princeton Survey Research Associates
Research Sponsor:	Times Mirror
Population:	National adult
Population Size:	1,511
Interview Method:	Telephone
Beginning Date:	December 1, 1994
Ending Date:	December 4, 1994
Source Document:	News Interest Index
Date of Source Document:	December 8, 1994

Item 14: Honesty and Ethical Standards of College Teachers
(Next, please tell me how you would rate the honesty and ethical standards of people in these different fields—very high, high, average, low, or very low?): college teachers.

Responses:

Very high	9%
High	41
Average	39
Low	8
Very low	1
No opinion	2

Survey Organization:	Gallup Organization
Research Sponsor:	Cable News Network, *USA Today*
Population:	National adult
Population Size:	1,008
Interview Method:	Telephone
Beginning Date:	September 23, 1994
Ending Date:	September 25, 1994
Source Document:	Gallup/CNN/*USA Today*
Date of Source Document:	November 3, 1994

Item 15: Rate Job Done by College Professors

Based on your own experience and observations, how would you rate the job being done by college professors—excellent, good, not very good, or poor?

Subpopulation:	Asked of half sample
Responses:	
Excellent	5%
Good	53
Not very good	15
Poor	7
Don't know	19
Survey Organization:	Barna Research Group
Population:	National adult
Population Size:	1,205
Interview Method:	Telephone
Beginning Date:	July 1993
Ending Date:	July 1993
Source Document:	*The Barna Report 1994–1995: Virtual America*
Date of Source Document:	July 1993

Item 16: Affirmative Action

From what you know generally these days, for each of the following positions please tell me whether you think a white male has a better or worse chance than nonwhites and women for getting each. Do you think a white male has a better or worse chance than nonwhites and women of... getting accepted at a university?

Responses:	
Better	49%
Worse	21
Same	21
Don't know/refused	9
Survey Organization:	Gallup Organization
Research Sponsor:	*Newsweek*
Population:	National adult
Population Size:	757
Interview Method:	Telephone
Beginning Date:	March 17, 1993
Ending Date:	March 18, 1993
Source Document:	Gallup/*Newsweek*
Date of Source Document:	March 21, 1993

Item 17: Affirmative Action

Do you believe that, because of past discrimination against black people, qualified blacks should receive preference over equally qualified whites in such matters as getting into college or getting jobs, or not?

Responses:

Yes, should	20%
No, should not	77
Don't know	3

Survey Organization:	Gallup Organization
Research Sponsor:	*Newsweek*
Population:	National adult
Population Size:	757
Interview Method:	Telephone
Beginning Date:	March 17, 1993
Ending Date:	March 18, 1993
Source Document:	Gallup/*Newsweek*
Date of Source Document:	March 21, 1993

Item 18: Affirmative Action

Because of past discrimination, should qualified blacks receive preference over equally qualified whites in such matters as getting into college or getting jobs?

Responses:

Preference	17%
No preference	78
Not sure	4
Refused	1

Survey Organization:	*Los Angeles Times*
Population:	National adult
Population Size:	1,474
Interview Method:	Telephone
Beginning Date:	June 12, 1993
Ending Date:	June 14, 1993
Source Document:	*Los Angeles Times*
Date of Source Document:	June 1993

Appendix B

Total Interviewees:	43
Location:	
Detroit	14
Memphis	7
Cherry Hill	10
San Antonio	12
Demographics:	
Male	33
Female	10
White	25
African American	14
Latino	4

Respondents:

Arts Director for City Parks
Attorney, Big Three Auto Manufacturer
Banker and Business Leader
CEO of Computer Consulting Firm
CEO, Urban Chamber of Commerce
City Chapter Director, NAACP
City Council Member
Community Development Administrator
Corporate Human Resources Director
Director of Mental Health Association

Director of Multi-County Social Service Agency
Editor, Weekly Business Publication
Editorial Columnist
Entrepreneur
Evangelical Pastor
Executive, Financial Services Corporation
Federal Presidential Appointee
Financial Adviser
Foundation President
Founder and CEO of Restaurant Chain
Founder and President, Training Corporation
General Manager, Cable Television Company
General Manager, Hotel
Insurance Company Executive
Management Consultant
Mayor
Municipal Judge
Music Director
Newspaper Publisher
Newspaper Bureau Chief
Parochial School Administrator
Personnel Director, Large Travel Agency
Program Manager, Radio Station
Radio Group Sales Executive
Retired Federal Reserve Board Member
State Senator
Suburban School Superintendent
Union Health Expert
Urban Library Director
Urban School Superintendent
Vice President of Medical Center
Vice President, International Services Corporation
Vice President, Telecommunications Company

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